C. Leroy Lawson, Jr.

In today’s ever changing world where cell phones and computers have become common household items, so too has the business of athletic field building changed to meet the needs of its users. Synthetic turf applications are rapidly growing across the country. Why? Reasons vary, but some of the most common cited include the ability to maximize field usage, the perceived and often real need for fewer maintenance inputs, and the fact that synthetic fields are an alternative to natural grass fields where drought and water restrictions are prevalent; although, the application of irrigation water is often recommended to reduce the surface temperature of synthetic fields.

While synthetic turf is not for everyone, it definitely has a place in the athletic field market. Once a decision to go with synthetic turf is made, there are several items that owners must take into consideration. Owners must assess the situation and determine their needs. What will be the use of the field? What sports will be played on the field? This will determine certain criteria such as dimensions of the field, the type of synthetic turf that best fits the application, and the markings on the field to accommodate the desired sports. Location must also be considered. Where will we build the field? Site choice is very crucial. The site and soils present must be tested. Geological testing must be done on the site to ensure that the site can support the desired field. The site must be size appropriate to accommodate the type of field desired. The soil quality of the site is also an important factor that can affect budgets. The soil makes up the sub base, which is the foundation for the base to follow. The overall field is only as good as the base underneath. Having certified engineers and architects on board is also another great idea. These qualified professionals can help work with both owners and contractors to make certain that the finished product will satisfy the needs at hand.

(continued on page 17)
Infield Topdressings

In general, there are four types of topdressings on the market today. Calcined clay is probably the most widely known. Calcined Clay: Quality calcined clays are usually made from the montmorillonite family of clays. They are fired to about 1200 degrees, a point where the clay particles become stable. Stable particles will not become soft or melt into a slimy clay when wet. Instead, they maintain their original shape and hardness. The firing process evaporates the moisture in the micro pores of the clay particles, making them extremely absorbent. Particles will release absorbed moisture, but at a slower rate. Calcined clays work exceptionally well as a topdressing for high-sand infield mixes. The firing process gives the clay particles a light bulk density. This prevents too much clay from sinking into the sandy soil. It also helps hold moisture at the surface. Normally, large pore spaces in high-sand base mixes allow gravity to pull moisture out. Calcined clay also works on normal infield mixes, but at times it can hamper field preparations after a rain. Particles that are on the field when rain comes absorb the water to their field capacity. When you’re trying to dry out the skin, the particles continue to release moisture. You have to add more calcined clay to the field to dry it up, and suddenly you have too much topdressing on the skin.

Vitrified Clay: Vitrified clay topdressing is made from the montmorillonite and illite clay families. These clays are fired to 2000 degrees, causing the particles to expand. The process creates macropores and reduces the amount of micropores. Thus, the vitrified clays absorb much less water than the calcined clays. If you’re looking for absorption, the finer grades will work a little better than the coarse grades.

Vitrified clay topdressings are not to be used on infield base mixes with high sand content. Vitrified clays have a heavier bulk density than calcined clays, and the topdressing will sink fairly quickly as it is agitated by play and regular maintenance. However, vitrified clays work tremendously well on normal or high-clay/silt infield base mixes. They can be used straight, but they work even better when mixed with a calcined clay in approximately a 60:40 or 70:30 vitrified to calcined ratio.
Meeting Needs with Synthetic Turf

(continued from page 17)

a geo-textile fabric to separate the base from the sub base, and then construct the base. The base shall consist of properly sized stones and fine grading to achieve desired drainage. Stone selection is crucial to the project. The stones comprise the base. They are important for the drainage of the field and the finished base product. The stones used shall have gone through a sieve analysis to ensure proper drainage of the base. "Shock pads" are sometimes used. This is a product that lies between the base and the actual carpet to absorb shock.

Once the base is complete, the synthetic turf company will come in and complete the project by installing the chosen synthetic surface on the field. The carpet is rolled out and seammed together. This is usually done by using adhesives or sewing. Once the carpet is laid, the infill is added. The infill is usually all rubber product or a rubber/silica sand mixture.

Play begins.

In summary, the steps include:

1. Removal of debris, brushing and dragging to re-distribute infill product, and spot cleaning to take care of biological spills.
2. With all things considered, the choice basically lies with the owners.
3. What are your needs?
4. Does a synthetic turf application work for you?
5. Reference

American Sports Builders Association
C. Leroy Lawson, Jr. is Territory Sales Manager,
Sports Construction Management Inc.

CHOOSE QUALIFIED BASE CONTRACTOR
Build Field
Play
Maintain

As stated earlier, the perceived and often real need for fewer management inputs is one of the reasons owners cite to select a synthetic turf field. Although less maintenance is generally required for synthetic fields compared to natural turfgrass fields, there are still maintenance requirements that must be executed to extend the life of a finished synthetic turf field. These maintenance requirements include (but are not limited to): removal of debris, brushing and dragging to re-distribute infill product, and spot cleaning to take care of biological spills.

With all things considered, the choice basically lies with the owners.

What are your needs?

Does a synthetic turf application work for you?

Reference

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Welcome New & Renewed Members .................. 3
Membership Form ........................................ 3
SFMANJ Board of Directors ......................... 3
Infield Soils and Topdressing - Part 2 .............. 4
2007 Proud Sponsor Director ...................... 11
Rudos to these Vendors! ............................... 12
Meeting Needs with Synthetic Turf ............... 14
Calendar of Events ................................ 16

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